

Lewis

INCREASE OF LIFE.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
BOSTON, APRIL 3, 1881,

BY

EDWARD E. HALE.

BOSTON:

GEO. H. ELLIS, PRINTER, 141 FRANKLIN ST.

. 1881.

INCREASE OF LIFE.

“Because I live, ye shall live also.”—JOHN xiv., 19.

To Jesus Christ, the unseen world and the world which is seen are one world and the same. We talk of “the other world,” “the future world,” “the world above”: he does not speak so. He speaks of heaven as if it were now and here, or might be; and, when they are confused with what he says, it is often because they see double where he sees singly. Nay: when he appears to be confused by what they say,—as sometimes happens,—the best account we can give is that they are talking of this visible world only, while he talks at once of the visible and invisible. There are a hundred texts which show his feeling,—“Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” “It is my Father who doeth these works at which you wonder. You do not see him; but, all the same, he is here.” “Father, I know that thou hearest me always. I would not have spoken aloud but for the help of these who are standing by.” And, when he expresses his trouble because language and metaphor fail him as they do, it is in this very difficulty. Language, having been made by people who rely on their senses, to answer the purposes of the visible and tangible world, breaks down, and breaks down very badly, when it is applied to the range, vastly wider, of that unseen world, which permeates this world, and in which this world floats as a straw floats in the ocean.

Many of you remember our dear friend Starr King’s celebrated discourse on “Substance and Shadow.” He was at work there to remove exactly this difficulty which the Master tried to remove, nor is there work more essential for the Master’s apostle. While we sat and listened to Mr. King, we felt and knew what Jesus teaches. The things which endure are faith and hope and love. Life is the sub-

stance, the hard-pan foundation, from which these forms and things around us are born. We cannot see life, nor handle it nor smell it nor hear it nor taste it. But life is; and without it nothing can even appear to be. In the beginning is the Word. Mr. King made us wonder that we had cared so much for this or that little thing, which is but a bubble tossed on the eternal ocean. For the moment, you said you would not be so fooled again. You would take fast hold on love, which you found to be a reality. You would live in hope, or in the infinite world, seeing that is the real world. You would trust wholly in God, seeing all being is from him; and these little things that perish in the using should fall into their own inferior place in your regard or thought or action. While that mood lasted, you caught the true Christian notion of life. There are not two lives,—a life of heaven there and a life of earth here. These two lives are one life. As the Lord's Prayer says, "God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven." This opens out the meaning of the more figurative phrase, "The kingdom of God is at hand."

The knowledge, that life is indeed larger than the little world we see, grows upon us in a thousand ways. The charm, always new, of watching a baby's life, rests in our interest in the steps of such growth. The little thing first learns its own hands, that they are its own. A little more, and it knows its mother's face, and that she also is its own. By and by, its world enlarges; and at last it knows the whole nursery, which seems a universe indeed, while it is a novelty, so much larger than the petty world the child was in before.

Such steps as these are really enlarging our life all the time afterward, though we do not perhaps note them with quite such eager curiosity. But it is just such a step, when the school-boy, who but yesterday was first in his class and could talk of nothing but the ambitions of the school-room, finds himself the smallest boy in a great mercantile house, where his existence is hardly suspected and nobody knows his name. He learns, by hard rubs perhaps, that the world is much larger than he thought. Yet his chief, the very "grand Cyrus" of them all, the master of masters, has to learn the same lesson. He takes his holiday on some favorable year, he crosses the ocean, he has or thinks he has some business with one of the merchant lords of London or of Paris; and, when the interview has been arranged, after some negotiation, he finds that he was never heard of before,

that now his name is forgotten, that there are perhaps a hundred others waiting for their turn, and that he, the first tradesman in his own county, may be yet a very small person in the larger world. So in the world of politics, in the world of literature, in the ambitions of fashion and society, precisely because we are infinite beings,—beings whose nature cannot be limited,—we find all the time that there is far more outside of us in life than we have ever yet attained to. We cannot often enough say that life gives us more, nature gives us more, the more we take. Yes, and the more life gives or nature gives, the more they offer.

The robin in its nest looks into a world made up of a few leaves and boughs around. As the feathers of its wings grow, it flutters a little from the branch, and is astonished to find that the orchard is so large. The bird of passage, when the instinct bred by the season carries it far north or far south, learns that the covert of a few trees, orchard or grove, was nothing to this larger world. Man, of all animals, compasses the whole globe; and then man, in turn, studies the universe outside of it, and finds that this world is a speck, and only a speck, in that universe of whose laws he finds out more and more every day, for they are not beyond the ken of a child of God.

The village boy growing to manhood finds that he is a member of the State as well as of the village. He does not lose his interest in the base-ball club or the singing-class, because he has gained an interest in the politics of the State, or is at work for the State Fair, or has been chosen to the Legislature. Then a great crisis comes upon him, and his life enlarges again. Sumter is fired on, and he takes a commission from the President, and enters the service of the nation. Still, he belongs to the village, and to the State. His life as a citizen of the State does not cease because he is an officer of the nation. Such is the illustration of the common life,—life here and life in heaven,—which Jesus Christ is always trying to make us comprehend, even by symbols which he owns are inadequate. You do live in Chester Square or in Union Park; but you also live in Massachusetts, and have duties and pleasures which to that life belong. More than this, you are a citizen of the United States, and as such have other duties and relations. Nay: even if you do not cross oceans or continents, you are also a citizen of the world, and as such have a life yet larger. More than this, says the Saviour of men, you live in heaven, and have

relations, pleasures, and duties, as a child of God, as a child of heaven. They are not apart from to-day's duties or pleasures. Rather they are all knit in with them. Nor are they the life of a to-morrow, unattainable until to-day is done with. They are the life of to-day, all mixed in with life which is visible and tangible. A woman's new life — when her first child is in her arms, wholly dependent on her — is, or may be, simply the life of a ministering angel. She does not care for herself, save as she cares for the child which depends on her. Her question is not, "Is the room too hot for me?" but "Is it too hot for him?" It is not, "What will entertain me?" but, "What will entertain him?" That measure of love is no more perfect in the ministry of an angel than is it in the ministry of any mother who surrenders herself to her child. So of the loyal, absorbed faith of a soldier going into battle. It is not, "Shall I best shelter myself here?" but, "How shall I best protect the men?" It is not, "Shall I get through easiest thus?" but, "How shall I best serve the cause?" No angel or archangel in any hierarchy of God can surpass that loyalty to a cause. And such faith as that, where it exists, manifests the law, the purpose, the system of God's own heaven. Such love as that mother's, such faith as that soldier's, are not to be spoken of as like the heavenly qualities: they are the heavenly qualities. What Jesus is trying to make us see is that heaven thus has its part and place in the world of time, and may wholly master it, if we will. To borrow a striking figure which I once heard Dr. Bush employ, the earth is as full of heaven as a sponge is full of water. Every pore is saturated and crowded with it. And the true child of God, who knows his own dignity, is not forever distinguishing between the sponge and what it holds, between things of time and things of eternity. How can he discriminate? Both are God's work. Both are in God's order. He can sweep a floor to God's glory as well as sing a psalm to his glory. As the true citizen does his duty, and does it of course and without question, never stopping to say, I do this as a Charlestown man, or I do this as a Massachusetts man, or I do this as an American, or this as a citizen of the world, but knows and feels that the one relation belongs to the other, reinforces it, and gains strength from it, just so the child of God lives his earthly life and his heavenly life at once and together. He does not define nor dissect nor analyze. There is no separation nor distinction. He speaks at once with the tongues of men and of angels. He does the deed at

once of earth and of heaven. He does his own will,—yes, and he does his Father's will in the same act. For he has so wrought out the divinity of his own nature that his life is hid in God's life. Of which union the perfect statement was made, when Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." For which also he prayed for us, when we prayed that we might be one, as they two are one.

Careless people sometimes express surprise when they find the same man exhibiting what they call the most opposite characters, that he is at once so practical and so ideal. Mr. Emerson, for instance, idealist of the idealists, teaches the most obdurate common-sense in the homeliest Saxon dialect. So Professor Peirce, who could weigh one comet against another in his scales, who could count the oscillations of the rays of the Pleiades and untangle the cords of the attractions of Orion, was, through and through, an idealist, never so much at home as when he spoke of the foundations of ethics, and in most weighty phrase, rendered homage to the truth. It is only careless people who are so surprised. Earth being all full of heaven, the surprising thing would be if this were not so. The man really practical will be thoroughly ideal. The child of God truly heavenly will deal with things of time as simply and as certainly as God does. Here in your Gospels is Matthew, whom you call and call rightly a man of affairs, tax-gatherer, merchant,—gives you your parables of usury, and buying and selling and all practical affairs. Yes; and it is he who writes down your beatitudes, with that mystic, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is he who writes, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It is he who sings, shall I say the eternal song of welcome: 'Come unto me, ye that labor and are heavy-laden; and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls.' So easily and certainly does a child of God find the eternal truth, and speak it, in the midst of earth's affairs.

Film by film, shred by shred, this child of God lays off one and another of the environments which fetter him. The baby is not held longer in his mother's arms: he totters alone. At last, he is master of the house, and may roam where he will. Nay, the day comes when the doubtful mother must let him run outdoors under his own control.

He grows to youth or manhood, and makes his own home. Not even orders from father or mother rule him longer. Perhaps he passes from land to land, acquires the sway of new languages, and is not bound even to one country. Perhaps his word controls other men. What he writes is read by all thinkers, what he thinks is applied in all laws. Perhaps he startles a generation of sleepers, and they take up their beds and walk. All this steady enlargement of life and power is certain, because he is God's child. The soul in him controls muscle, nerve, sense, fibre, blood-vessels, and brain. The God in him controls the organic frame of an earthly tabernacle. One step more, and the sweet singer, who yesterday wrote some psalm of praise for a few companions, casts off this earthly house of a mortal tabernacle, and joins in the chorus of a nobler and larger worship.

The careful reasoner who, with the little tricks of two or three earthly algebras, untangled the problems of the universe, drops off the house of an earthly tabernacle, sees as he is seen and knows as he is known, and rejoices in the untangled heavenly verities. The faithful friend, who let no hour pass unless he had ministered to this orphan, had braced up yonder hesitant, had lifted him who was fallen, or comforted her who was starving, casts off this frail house of an earthly tabernacle; and lo! infinite resource with which to minister, no lack of time for endeavor, and no grinding burden of fatigue. She who, for months and years, lay gently on the sick-bed, who received from one and another a thousand tender ministrations to her pain, and repaid them all in her thankful patience,—she casts off this frail house of this earthly tabernacle; and lo! with the same love, with the same patience, with the same gratitude, she is ministering to them and to ten thousand more, in this glad freedom of disembodied life. As the baby passes into the boy, the boy into the youth, the youth into the man, so, in one more change, not unlike these others, the child of God stands free in the untrammelled life of heaven.

The revelation of life in Jesus Christ is not simply the fact of his personal reappearance after death. Before he died, he had quickened the life of the world, renewed it enlarged it. "I am the resurrection and the life: whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Whoever lives with that control of sense and organ by the living soul which to the Christian man is possible, whoever rises superior to

pain, hunger, want, whoever lives with the divine life of a son of God, that man knows he does not die. The answer falls fitly on the wretched plaint of Martha, dissatisfied, as well she might be, with the faith of her country and of her time. She sobs out her doleful creed: "I know that he shall rise again, at that distant resurrection, at that last day, which is, oh, so wretchedly far away!" How often has that mournful plaint of that Jewish woman been repeated by persons who have been taught the same Eastern doctrine of a suspended animation, even in Christian churches! Christ will have none of it. "Dead! Do you think I shall die? You believe in me! Do you think any child of God dies? If he once learns to live, if he live in the large life,—the life that believes, that loves, that hopes,—he knows he cannot die."

It is indeed a faith which it needs such as Jesus to instil. Those who knew him took it in and made it real. For us, we drink at the same fountain. The promise was not an empty promise; and when the moment comes, when the cloud opens and the heaven reveals itself, the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, speaks to us. Nor is it any new doctrine. It is the word which spoke from the beginning. The Comforter speaks to say that the world of God is larger than this world of man. The life of God is larger than this life, hemmed in by the powers of five senses only, and unable to know more or to do more. The Father of perfect love is always training us for that larger life and those fuller powers. Sometimes he shows us that this is possible. When he calls the careful thinker who has exhausted earthly processes, or the brave leader who has quickened a thousand thousand lives, nay, the loving boy who has shown me what the kingdom of heaven is and what it is like, or the unselfish mother whose life has been all made up of help and blessing to those around her,—when God lifts these into a life unembodied, and therefore unseen, he teaches me again the lesson which Jesus was teaching always. Such lives have larger sphere and duty; for God's purpose is larger than these cramped places and these passing hours. Who lives as they have lived, and with such faith as their faith, these never die.